

# Light

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Cover picture: American Black Swallowtail Butterfly

Note: All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James version except where another version is indicated after the text.





# Editorial

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THIS issue begins a new series of short articles under the title ‘Marvellous are Your Works’, a reference to the words of the Psalmist (see page 27). The first article deals with the subject of ‘**metamorphosis**’ in the insect world. The cover picture of a butterfly reminds us of this wonderful transforming process which takes place in the natural world, which is a testimony to the creative power of God who designed all living things.

It may surprise you to learn that the word ‘**metamorphosis**’ is used in the Bible to describe a similar process which takes place in those who are prepared to put their trust in God’s Word and live their lives by it’s teaching. The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the first century Christians at Rome in which he reminded them about the need for making sacrifices to achieve spiritual growth:

‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God’

[Romans 12.1,2]

In the original Greek language of the New Testament, the word ‘**transformed**’ in this passage is made up of two words ‘**meta**’ and ‘**morphoo**’. These Greek words are used to convey to the reader of Paul’s letter the idea of a complete change from one state to another –

a metamorphosis. The idea is only used in one other place and it's in connection with the transfiguration of Christ where we read:

'Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was **transfigured** (Greek = metamorphoo) before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them' [Mark 9.2,3].

It is difficult for us to imagine what those three disciples of Jesus witnessed – the record tells us that *'they were greatly afraid'*. But the words of Jesus that preceded this [Mark 9.1] remind us that the transformation or '**metamorphosis**' that Jesus underwent was a foretaste of the glory that would be his after the resurrection when his body was changed and made *'after the power of an endless life'* [Hebrews 7.16].

The message of God's Word is that, like the butterfly and those other amazing creatures who undergo this transformation called '**metamorphosis**', our lives must be changed now. We must not let the world we live in squeeze us into its mould. Through the understanding and application of the Scriptures in our lives we must be transformed – to become new creatures now. We can then look forward to an even greater transformation in that time to come when God through Christ will *'make all things new'* [Revelation 21.5]. The Apostle Paul anticipated this great transformation when he wrote to the 1st Century believers at Corinth:

'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new' [2 Corinthians 5.17].

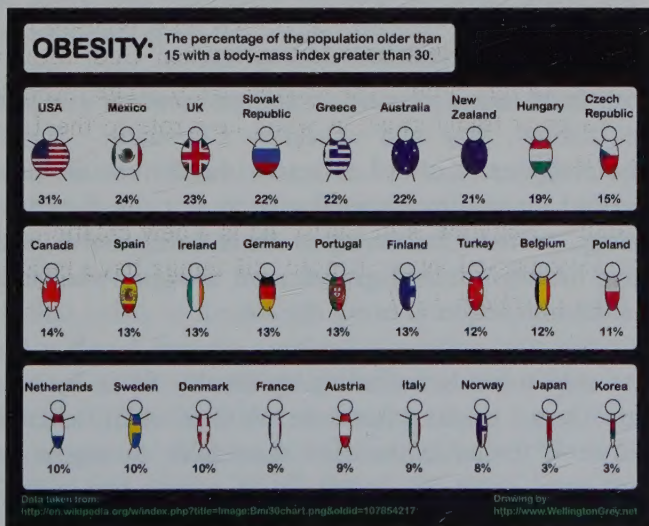
Editor



# A Healthy Diet

**H**UMAN life often presents us with contrasts that highlight perplexing characteristics of human behaviour. For example, so much misery and ill health stems from having a poor diet. Poverty and famine bring starvation for millions who do not seek such deprivation. In general they are often the victims of war, the greed of others, gross mismanagement and squandering of available resources, or natural climatic conditions which lead to poor crops and famine.

On the other hand, within the richer nations, complacency, greed and laziness lead to obesity. Obesity is something which has become almost endemic and certainly in the UK a major source of extra expenditure for the National Health Service. It is estimated that one in five men and a quarter of women in the UK are obese and in the USA 25% are obese with three States estimated at having a third of all adults who are obese (i.e. having a body mass index of more than 30 - see chart). Obesity in children is also a major cause for concern in these countries.



At the other end of the scale there are also those who for the sake of fashion and social acceptance amongst their peers, starve themselves to get into ever smaller sizes of clothing! Models trying to reach size zero have been in the UK headlines recently and there is controversy about fashion companies trying to promote such unrealistic and health threatening fashions.

Human beings are adept at going to extremes and yet a healthy diet is essential to both good mental and physical health. Overweight and obese children face having a shorter, poorer quality life span and many associated mental and physical health problems. Overweight and obese adults will have a shorter life span and face illnesses such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, skeletal disorders, cancer and many other potential health deficits.

Yet for all the health promotion work undertaken by health professionals, few take much notice! Few will make changes to their life style and eat a healthy diet. Few will stop eating the 'junk' and other unhealthy foods that generally are the staple diet of many who are overweight. All advice is ignored until disaster strikes, but then it is often too late!

### SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Now with these issues in mind, in spiritual matters it is just as easy to become 'flabby', lazy and unhealthy Christians. How? Well, Christ's disciples cannot afford to starve themselves of the essential nutrients needed for healthy spiritual growth, nor can they afford to be spiritually lazy. True Christianity is about being active, reading the Bible to give healthy spiritual growth, and showing what faith means by putting faith into action in every day life.

The first step towards becoming spiritually fit is by taking in a healthy diet. Jesus, quoting from the writings of Moses, said: *'Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that*



*proceeds from the mouth of the LORD [Deuteronomy 8.3].* Jesus also said:

‘He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me’ [*John 14.24*].

So we see that just as bread is a healthy staple food able to provide physical nourishment, the first important step to spiritual health is to know the Word of God. The next step for having good physical health is to take regular exercise. Likewise if we are to become spiritually fit, we must keep the words of the Lord Jesus and act upon them. Now Peter wrote:

‘If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ’ [*1Peter 4.11*].

How can we speak according to the ordinances and Word of God if we do not ‘eat’ the bread (Word) of life? The lesson is clear from the words of Jesus, that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Further, without the right spiritual food, how can we be active in ‘ministering’ in the service of God? How can our lives bring honour and glory to Him?

Spiritual malnourishment or spiritual obesity triggered by eating the wrong spiritual diet, will bring spiritual lethargy and ill health, followed by a very limited life span. We live in an age when many people speak anything but from the oracles of God. An honest look at the chaos that exists in the world, shows that people seek after human rights and material benefits, without accepting any responsibility for their personal actions. Mankind believes and follows humanistic philosophies, a ‘junk food’ diet lacking the right ingredients that leads to an eternal grave. Mankind in general does not want to know the Great Creator and source of all things, let alone learn the Creator’s

wisdom. The result is a world that endures the consequences of greed, strife, war, famine, disease and so many other ills that beset the human race.

### SPIRITUAL FAMINE

The prophet Amos warned the nation of Israel:

‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD’ [Amos 8.11].

In a similar way in the modern world there is a famine, not of material things, not of foods to satisfy the stomach, but a famine of the Word of God. This famine is a result for the most part of a deliberate choice, a refusal to ‘eat’ the spiritual sustenance of His Word. Thus mankind reduces spiritual weight towards size zero!

Even many who describe themselves as being Christian have turned from a healthy diet of the Word and allowed humanistic thought to influence and change the basic teachings of Scripture, not realising that it is but a thin diet indeed, devoid of the life giving vitamins and other nutrients needed for healthy spiritual growth. The Truth of Scripture is abandoned to make an easier less challenging life and Christians are the poorer for it! For example the established churches teach:

- ☞ That God and Jesus are co-equal as part of a trinity.
- ☞ That we are saved by faith alone, irrespective of works.
- ☞ That Christians go to heaven at death.

On the other hand the Bible says:

- ‘For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus’ [1Timothy 2.5].



- 'faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead...You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only' [*James 2.17, 24*].
- 'For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing' [*Ecclesiastes 9.5*].

The Bible also tells us that Jesus Christ will return [*Acts 1.11*] and that there will be a time of great trouble and unrest before He comes [*Matthew 24.21, 22*]. Thus the 'last days' before the return of Jesus will call for spiritual stamina if we are to endure to the end and run the race of life to its ultimate conclusion. The Word of God calls upon us to turn from a poor diet, to a healthy diet and to turn from man made philosophy to the healthy, nutrient filled 'bread of Life' provided within the Scriptures.

#### A HEALTHY SPIRITUAL LIFE STYLE

Amidst the teeming billions of humanity that have existed throughout the ages, a few, a small remnant will be found who have walked the path of wisdom, those who have loved and obeyed the Word of God. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, He will invite them to enter into His Kingdom. They will be privileged to inherit all things and never hunger nor thirst for righteousness again [*Matthew 5.6*].

We can only follow this path and eat of the life giving Word, by a daily reading of the Scriptures. But looking at the Bible is not enough, its words must be '**eaten**', taken into the heart and mind, thus forming the foundation of our thoughts and guiding our every action. If that is the case then we will neither be spiritually obese, nor starving, but will be active and willing in following Jesus.

For many, the Christmas holiday period and New Year is a time for over indulgence in food and drink and materialism, the exact opposite of Jesus' life and example, he who was born in a manger and had few material possessions. We urge you to think about Jesus and His

example. You can eat spiritual junk food, or you can eat a healthy diet of the Word. You can be spiritually inactive, or you can take exercise by putting God's Word into action in your life. The prophet Isaiah puts the matter in true perspective:

'Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price...Incline your ear, and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live'

*[Isaiah 55.1,3]*

What will your New Year's resolution be?

Andy Peel  
Northampton, UK

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# Bible Teaching about...

## The Mediatorship of Christ

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IN order to understand this subject we need to accept that God is Supreme, from everlasting to everlasting, has absolute power and possesses knowledge and wisdom in perfection. He is also righteous, just and pure. The nature of man on the other hand is mortal, weak and in direct opposition to God.

Mankind was condemned to die because of sin and he is in the unenviable position of facing an eternal grave but for God's plan of salvation and Christ's central part in it.

### THE NEED FOR A MEDIATOR

There is a deep divide between man and his Maker; a rift which is unbridgeable but for the divine plan of salvation. God himself has provided a way whereby the rift may be repaired and a relationship with God made possible. This plan of redemption is God given and is the only route to peace with God. Man, however, like his first parents who sewed fig leaves together to cover their sin, vainly tries to find remedies of his own which are less onerous to him yet totally ineffective.

The word 'religion' is derived from the latin verb '*religio*' and actually means '*rebinding*' or drawing together separated parts. That's what true religion is all about - God's provision of a way to repair the damage done by man to his relationship with God - not salvation from the 'fiery punishments of hell' as is commonly thought, but from

eternal death in the grave. God's penalty for sin is death - motionless, bereft of thought, consumed.

The Scriptures are quite clear on this. Death is the result of sin. Death is real. Death is terminal. Every headstone you see represents a life stilled, unproductive, non-existent, and every headstone you see represents eternal loss but for the acceptance of the divine way. We all sin – we all die. We possess a sinful, dying nature inherited from our first parents (Adam and Eve) who, together with their environment, were cursed for disobedience. It must therefore be clear that if God provides a way of salvation there can only be one divinely approved way. That way is revealed in the Scriptures. *'Jesus said... "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"' [John 14.6].* This is **THE ONLY WAY** to escape eternal death.

#### THE ROLE OF A MEDIATOR

God's plan involves the provision of a mediator between His majesty and our weakness. A mediator is one who acts between two estranged parties. People who are close and in harmony don't need a mediator. They can communicate without falling out. But where there is a rift, a mediator can often smooth out the wrinkles in a human relationship and bring peace between the parties concerned.

The gulf between God and man is far deeper than any human rift and requires the wisdom of God to rebuild the connection and the reverence and humility of a man or woman to realise their dreadful plight ? that naturally he or she has *'no hope and is without God in the world'* [Ephesians 2.12].

This connection has been made possible through God's provision of Christ as a mediator. He is the one who pleased God in everything he did. In fact during his ministry he displayed the divine character to perfection and consequently God was very pleased with his perfect service. This is demonstrated by one of Christ's names, *'Emmanuel'* or



'God with us' [Matt 1. 23]. As the name implies, he was a manifestation of God's character although contrary to the beliefs of Trinitarians, he was not part of the Godhead.

Christ's perfect life was selflessly offered to God in sacrifice opening the way for a connection to be established between thoughtful and receptive men and women and God. For this reason he is able to stand in God's presence and plead on behalf of the people who follow in His footsteps. There is no rift between God and His Son Jesus Christ. We should thank God for sending Jesus into the world and grasp this **ONE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE!**

#### MELCHIZEDEK

Throughout the history of the world, the Scriptures imply there has always been a Priesthood established by God, to mediate between God and man. In Abraham's day, a man called Melchizedek was the priest. Throughout the period of the Law of Moses, God's law was administered to the Jewish nation by the Levitical Priesthood. Jesus was the '*end of the Law*' [Romans 10.4] and became '*a High Priest of the good things to come*' and '*the mediator of the new covenant*' [Hebrews 9.11,15]. The position of Melchizedek is of particular interest in relation to the present role of Jesus.

We are told in Genesis Chapter 14 the details concerning a military expedition carried out by Abraham with the object of recovering goods and personnel stolen from a nearby city together with his nephew, Lot, who had been taken prisoner. Abraham was a wealthy and resourceful man who is described as the friend of God, due to his faithfulness [James 2.23]. Abraham mounted a retaliatory strike against the enemy and, in God's mercy, returned triumphant with Lot, the other captives and the lost property [Genesis 14.11-16].

As he returned from this campaign, rejoicing that by God's grace his nephew had been saved from captivity, he was met by this

venerable man, Melchizedek. He is described as King of Salem, Salem being one of the names of the city of Jerusalem used in Scripture. He brought with him bread and wine and he is described as the Priest of the most High God. In addition he blessed Abraham who gave him tithes (a tenth) of all the recovered goods. [Genesis 14.18-20].

Now this apparently insignificant event is revealed later in the Scriptures as having a more significant meaning. Melchizedek is mentioned in Psalm 110 and it is worth spending a little time examining this. This is a Messianic Psalm and initially refers to the time when God's purpose will be complete and Christ will rule from Jerusalem on the throne of David. It describes the future work of Christ as '*sending the rod of your strength out of Zion, to rule in the midst of your enemies.*' [Psalm 110.2].

#### 'A PRIEST FOR EVER'

Then the Psalm includes this important divine promise: '*The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek"*' [Psalm 110. 4]. This Psalm then goes on to speak of the destruction of God's enemies and the Glory of God in that day (verses 5, 6). Now this leads us to conclude that the seemingly unimportant event in Genesis contains much instruction. This is amplified further in the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews.

The purpose of this letter becomes clear as we read it. It is a long letter and closely reasoned and great care is needed in reading it. But it emphasises repeatedly the supremacy of Christ as a High Priest. Now immortalised and dwelling at God's right hand, his priesthood is more beneficial than any other that preceded it.

#### THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

The Jews always set great store by Moses and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is explaining logically that the priesthood they so



admire, has been replaced by Christ's Priesthood. In chapter 5 the writer confirms the prophetic words of the Psalm that Christ is a *'priest according to the order of Melchizedec'* [Hebrews 5.10]. It is pointed out that all priesthoods that have been installed at various points in time were in order to mediate between God and man and to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins [Hebrews 8.3]. This would be applicable to the Levitical Priesthood who should have had compassion on those they served, knowing their own weakness and who offered for their own sins as well [Hebrews 5. 2].

Such priesthoods are ordained of God they are not self created [Hebrews 5.4] It was no different with Christ who *'did not glorify himself to become high priest; but it was he (God) who said to him: 'You are my Son, Today I have begotten you' [Hebrews 5.5] - quoting the words of Psalm 110.*

### CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

The writer to the Hebrews continues: *'though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And having been perfected, (given divine nature) he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him. Called by God as high priest according to the order of Melchizedec'* [Hebrews 5.8-10]. He continues this theme in chapter 6 where the promises to Abraham are considered. Those promises were confirmed by a divine oath and *'because he (God) could swear by no one greater, he swore by himself'* [Hebrews 6.13].

This divinely guaranteed promise enables those with faith in it to have a hope *'as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the inner part behind the veil'* [Hebrews 6.19], a reference to the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle symbolic of the divine presence. That, after all, is the ultimate promise to those who approach Him in the right way that *'God may be all in all'* [1 Corinthians 15.28]. The writer to the Hebrews refers to Christ's exalted position in this way: *'where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having*

become high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek' [Hebrews 6.20]. This refers to the ascension of Jesus to heaven itself. He entered into the Holiest of All and sits, in perfection, at the right hand of God in the heavens as high priest pleading for his people.

#### MELCHIZEDEK - PRIEST AND KING

So having understood these basic things the writer to the Hebrews takes us on another logical journey which reveals more about the priesthood of Christ. In chapter 7 we are reminded that Melchizedec received tithes from Abraham, that the name Melchizedek means 'king of righteousness' (quite a title! and right in line with God's purpose). We are also reminded that he was king of Salem which means '*king of peace*' [Hebrews 7.2].

These are two of the foremost features of the reign of Christ on the earth. Peace and righteousness are states that elude mankind and will continue to do so until Christ returns as he promised, to establish his Father's kingdom on earth. Hebrews states that there are no details of Melchizedek's origins or his demise and so it appears he is a priest forever in a symbolic way - '*made like the Son of God*' [Hebrews 7. 3]. Next we are asked to consider how great this man was, in that he received tithes of the spoils of war from Abraham who was therefore of a lesser standing than Melchizedec [Hebrews 7. 4].

So Melchizedec was a great man. The writer now refers to the Levitical Priesthood and their right to take tithes from all the tribes of Israel. But Abraham was the father of the tribes of Israel including the Levites. When Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedec the Levites did not exist, still being as it were in the loins of their ancestor Abraham [Hebrews 7. 5-10]. We can see then that the Levites paid tribute to Melchizedec indirectly with the tithes paid by Abraham.

Clearly the priestly order of Melchizedec is vastly superior to that of the Levites and so Abraham who received the divine promises, was



blessed by the founder of this great priestly order of Melchizedec [Hebrews 7.7]. The Law of Moses was superseded by the law of Christ, for the old Levitical Priesthood no longer served a purpose. Jesus had fulfilled all the requirements of that Law which was but '*a shadow of good things to come*' [Hebrews 10.1]. Christ, after a different and higher order, mediates for his people in the presence of God and his mediation is profitable for salvation for the faithful believer:

'Therefore, he is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them' [Hebrews 7. 25].

#### WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR US?

This wonderful provision of the Almighty to establish a way of salvation was secured by the work of Christ. Being of human nature [Hebrews 2.17] he is the ideal mediator because he was tempted in all points like us or as we are told elsewhere, '*He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities*' [Hebrews 4.15 AV]. His character is spotless, being '*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*' [Hebrews 7.26]. Being of our nature, he too needed salvation from death and so God raised him because the grave could not hold him [Hebrews 9.11- 14].

The importance of Christ's work as a Mediator can perhaps be summed up in two more quotations from the letter to the Hebrews:

'But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.' [Hebrews 8. 6].

'And for this reason he is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.'

[Hebrews 9. 15].

Finally, there is the reminder that there is only **ONE** way: *'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;'* [1Timothy 2. 5].

We hope it is clear then that Jesus is Mediator between God and those who bear Christ's name. His priesthood is an everlasting one, and not based in the priesthood of the Levites which was purely temporary for the regulation of the Jewish nation. But that old system did foreshadow the work of Christ. His Priesthood is superior to the Levitical Priesthood, in that it is able to provide salvation from sin and death which the latter was unable to do. It is through him alone that acceptable prayer can be made. There is no other route to salvation but through him.

The question that has to be asked, is, are we related to God through Christ in the only way appointed, through baptism into His name? Those who are in this position might endure trials and tribulations like their Master. If they die they will be raised from the grave. If they are then found faithful they will receive the reward of immortal life and companionship with him in his Kingdom. They will have been forgiven their sins through the sacrifice of Christ who mediates on their behalf. This is something we can put our trust in because it is sure and certain that God's purpose will be accomplished in the earth.

John Morse  
West Midlands, UK



## ***From our Mail Bag***

A question has been asked - what do the words '**You are gods**' in the following passage mean: *'Jesus answered them, - "Is it not written in your law, I said, **You are gods**?" 'If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came, (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"' [John 10. 34-36].*

Jesus is quoting from Psalm 82. In this Psalm, God through the writer is telling the judges of the people to judge wisely and honestly. In the first verse the writer states that God '*judges among the gods*'. He is the supreme judge who will judge the judges if they do wrong. Verse 2 tells us that they '*judge unjustly*' and he exhorts them in verse 3 to '*defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy.*'

Verse 5 laments the fact that these judges who are doing wrong '*walk about in darkness*' – they don't want to walk in the light of God's word. This leads to the words Jesus quoted: '*I said, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes"*' [Psalm 82.6,7].

These two verses contrast the highness of their calling, '*You are gods and...children of the Most High*' with their certain end: '*you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.*' The Psalm ends with the writer appealing to God to be the final judge; '*Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all nations*' [Psalm 82.8].



From looking at Psalm 82 we can see that the 'gods' referred to are mortal (they '*die like men*'), although they have a very high calling. The words translated 'gods' are *theos* (Greek) in John 10 and *elohim* (Hebrew) in Psalm 82. Both words have basically the same meaning - 'mighty ones'. The word is generally used to refer to a deity – usually the Lord God but sometimes the false gods of the pagans. Another word used to refer to these pagan gods is 'idols' which were just carved images or statues of the pagan god. The following verses contrast the many different gods of the pagans with the one God of the Bible: '*...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth...yet for us there is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we live for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things...*' [1 Corinthians 8.4-6].

Although in most cases the Hebrew word '*elohim*' translated 'gods' is used to refer to a deity, occasionally it refers to judges (see Exodus 21.6, 22.8, 22.9 and 1 Samuel 2.25) where the quotations very clearly talk about the men who, under the Law of Moses were responsible for judging over certain matters. Psalm 82 implies that to liken the role of the judges to that of a deity, judging between life and death as it were, was to make them realise their responsibility. Sadly though, Psalm 82 shows that they failed.

Now we can return to the verse in John chapter 10. In verse 33 the Jews are going to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Jesus in verse 34 points out that the title of honour '*you are gods*' was given to men in the past under the Law of Moses. These men were not stoned for blasphemy! So why were they going to stone Jesus who was only claiming to be the Son of God? As ever Jesus was ready with a masterful answer showing his incredible mastery of Scripture and his ability to bring it to bear whatever the circumstance.

Jonathan Rowland  
Kent, UK

# Bible Characters

## Ezra and Nehemiah

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**T**HE books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe two different aspects of an exciting period in the history of the Jews, when they were able to return from captivity to their own city of Jerusalem. Seventy years before they had been forcibly taken away from the land to which God had led them after their exodus from Egypt, under the hand of Moses.

It was as a result of their continued failure to obey God's laws and to put their trust in Him, that eventually the warnings of the prophets came true, and king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came and took large numbers of them as captives to Babylon. They were dispossessed from the land that God had promised to their forefathers. Despite this sad time, there were some who knew that this captivity did not spell the end of the Jews as a people, or the final destruction of Jerusalem. Faithful men who did trust God, understood why the captivity had taken place and that eventually it would be reversed.

These books of Ezra and Nehemiah are not just interesting Jewish records of events that took place many centuries ago. They foreshadow events still in the future. Ezra was a priest, and he helped the Jews understand God's laws again. In the same way a great spiritual revival will take place when Jesus comes again to set up the Kingdom of God.

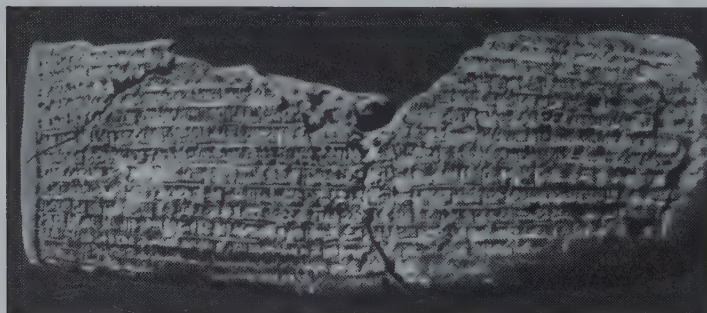
Nehemiah was a governor, and he took care of the physical rebuilding of the wall of the city of Jerusalem and the organisation of civil affairs. The Kingdom of God of the future is a literal kingdom, and it will be administered with complete justice and efficiency from Jerusalem.

There are also personal lessons that we can learn as individuals. Ezra and Nehemiah had different roles and personalities, but they both had great faith in God and patience, even when confronted with opposition and disappointment. They could see good things happening even when times were difficult, and they had an unshakeable confidence that God was working with them.

### THE PROMISED RETURN

‘Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!”’ [2 Chronicles 36. 22,23].

Those who witnessed the drama and the trauma of the captivity must have wondered if Jerusalem would ever be the same again, despite the comforting words of Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 25.12,13 and 33.4-9). How wonderful it must have been when, after nearly a lifetime, Babylon fell to the Persians and the new king made his proclamation (see picture below). The prophet was right after all and a year later the temple foundation was laid once again.



*The Cylinder of Cyrus*



But although we associate the 'return' with the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the decree of Cyrus was issued long before Ezra himself set foot in the city. It is quite possible that he was not even born then. The temple itself would not be finished for another 20 years, when king Darius had replaced Cyrus, and the initial opposition of the local Samaritans had been overcome. It would be nearly 60 more years before Ezra arrived.



*Ezra reads from the book of the Law  
(Nehemiah Chapter 8)*

With this distance both in miles and years, how was it possible for Ezra to be described in the divine record as '*a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given*' [Ezra 7.6]. How could he have maintained such skill in understanding the Law of Moses, living as he did hundreds of miles away, and had in all probability never been near the land of Israel?

The answer can only be that there was a community of Jews in exile, who had resolved to maintain their belief and obedience to God, expressed through the Law of Moses, during all those years in captivity. God Himself had remained faithful to them, enabling them to preserve their written records and identity, so that His purpose with the Jews would not be lost.

When Ezra crossed the desert to Jerusalem with the blessing of king Artaxerxes accompanied by a new wave of returning exiles, it is likely

that he had only ever heard of Jerusalem before, and when he arrived there, he faced a series of challenges. It soon became apparent to him why the Jews were still struggling to maintain their newly restored temple against the oppositions of the surrounding peoples. He felt ashamed of all the support and generosity that the Persians had bestowed upon him, when he found that the people had failed to separate themselves from the ungodly peoples in the land [Ezra 9.1,2].

Responsible leaders had been foremost in sharing their 'abominations' and inter-marrying with them [Ezra 10.2], the very things that had led to their original captivity. While they continued to live like this, God would withhold His blessing from them.

#### SPIRITUAL RESTORATION

But Ezra had come back with gifts of gold and silver to reinstate the temple. He led the people in a great ceremony of re-dedication and confession: *'For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but he extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem'* [Ezra 9. 9].

Ezra was very conscious of the over-ruling hand of God in restoring the captives to their own land and enabling the temple to be rebuilt. He was also acutely aware that the people had a long way to go before they were fit to be called God's people. Yet God had never taken away His word, by which they could learn and understand about Him. Ezra was a scribe and a priest, sent by God to lead the people back to Him.

Ezra faithfully performed the work that so many other priests and scribes had neglected to do. In our days too, God has provided us with the means to return to Him. He has preserved His Word, and He has provided us with a priest, in Jesus Christ. If we associate ourselves with Jesus in the way he has commanded, he will become our priest, even as he sits at the right hand of God in heaven. We can then

approach God reverently in the same way that Ezra did, through prayer, and know that God will hear us through Jesus [*Hebrews 10.19-23*].

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews began to return to the land of their ancestors again after being in exile in many parts of the world for nearly 2,000 years. Bible students were able to foresee this restoration then because the prophets spoke of a 'latter day' re-gathering of the Jews and an end to Gentile domination [*Luke 21.24*]. What has not happened yet is a new spiritual restoration. This time is still in the future, as we know from prophecies that refer to a Jewish national repentance, together with a recognition of Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

'Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh' [*Ezekiel 36. 25,26*].

Another Old Testament prophet had put his finger on the reason why God allowed the re-building of the temple to suffer constant setbacks. Haggai rebuked the people for being more concerned with re-building their own houses than they were for re-building the temple [*Haggai 1.1-4, 8*]. This surely is a lesson to pay due attention to building the 'house of God', which today is an analogy for the community of true believers who look for the coming Kingdom of God, and the time when God's glory will fill the earth [*Psalms 37.29, 2 Corinthians 5. 1*]. This is far more important than seeking pleasure and satisfaction in the present world.

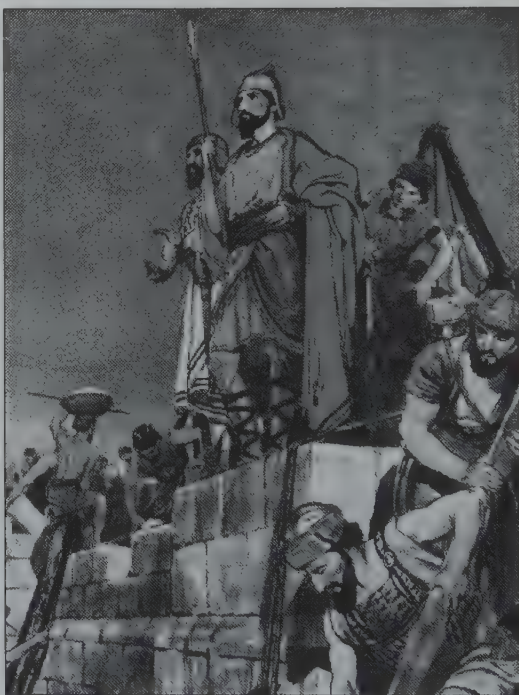
#### NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

While Ezra struggled to bring the people back to God, news of the troubles in Jerusalem reached Nehemiah, the Jewish cupbearer to Artaxerxes in the Persian palace of Shushan (Susa). Nehemiah was



greatly vexed when he heard of broken down walls and gates that had been burned with fire [Nehemiah 1.3,4]. He acknowledged at once the reason for the original captivity and prayed earnestly to God that he might have the opportunity to contribute to the restoration.

Here is an example of a man praying to God and then having to wait before the answer was revealed. The reaction of the king was entirely in God's hands. The king noticed Nehemiah's anxiety and asked him what the trouble was. Even then, Nehemiah prayed for guidance in what to say. Then he boldly made his request. *'And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it"'* [Nehemiah 2. 5].



*Re-building the walls of Jerusalem*

Like Ezra, Nehemiah frequently prayed to God for a blessing, for guidance, to praise, and to confess. They prayed not knowing how God would answer, but they always put God before themselves and knew that there would be an answer, and that it would be the right one. They were able to see how God did answer, but even then they were never far from trouble or danger. More than once Nehemiah uttered the words, *'Remember me, my God, for good,'* as he carried on despite

bitter opposition [*Nehemiah 5. 19; 13. 31*], and we can be certain that he will be remembered when the days of peace do finally come.

### THE GOVERNOR

Nehemiah is noted particularly for his tireless work as a builder who reconstructed the wall of the city. Constantly he was laughed at and hindered by adversaries, who were so persistent that guards had to protect the workers. The work proceeded night and day until it was completed in less than eight weeks. We do not know whether Nehemiah had any previous skills as a builder, but we do know that he held a responsible position serving the king of Persia. Now the time had come for God to use Nehemiah's commitment and reliability in a different way.

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem about 15 years after Ezra. For all that time, Ezra had encountered many difficulties. When the wall was finally rebuilt, the spiritual re-birth that Ezra had been nurturing, moved rapidly forward. A public reading of the Law that God gave through Moses was organised: *'Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law'* [*Nehemiah 8.3*].

A public confession of sins followed, and then the dedication of the wall. But even so, it had not proved possible to completely root out corruption and disobedience to God's law. When he returned from a visit back to Persia, Nehemiah discovered that even the priests and Levites had allied themselves with the very men who had done so much to hinder the rebuilding of the city [*Nehemiah 13.4, 7,8*].

We know nothing about Nehemiah before his request to the king, but his life teaches us important lessons. He was obviously a valued employee, and he was also faithful to his God in a foreign land, where it could be very difficult to worship God as he would have liked.

Jesus said that *'He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?'* [Luke 16.10,11)]. Because Nehemiah had fulfilled his duty as the king's servant, and maintained his allegiance to God, it was clear that he was worthy to carry out a much more important mission for God.

### THE FUTURE FOR US

In the same way, if we can show that we are honest and trustworthy, even if our lives are difficult, and also show that we believe and trust God's Word, then God will lead us to His Kingdom. During the journey we may have many problems but God will never leave us.

Jesus said, *'But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things (i.e. the things that we need in this present life) shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'* [Luke 12.31,32]. The temptation to put ourselves first, to make friends with people who will not help us serve God, or to be discouraged because God seems to put obstacles in our way, will always exist. But like Ezra and Nehemiah, we must obey God's Word and look forward to His coming Kingdom which will be set up on the earth. Then we will be able to echo Nehemiah's prayer with confidence:

'Remember me, my God, for good'.

Alan Wharton  
Surrey, England



# ‘Marvellous are Your works’

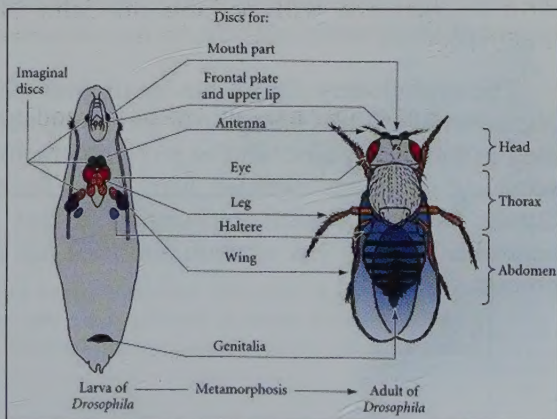
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THE title of this new series of short articles is taken from Psalm 139 verse 14. It is an exclamation of praise by the Psalmist who acknowledges the great creative power of God. We shall be exploring a number of different aspects of this vast subject in future articles.

## ‘METAMORPHOSIS’

It is a well-known fact that caterpillars turn into butterflies and maggots into flies. But the process by which this transformation (known as ‘metamorphosis’) takes place, is so amazing and complicated that for any reasonable mind an accidental development of the process, as demanded by the theory of evolution, is completely ruled out.

The key to the transformation is DNA - those huge chemical molecules that act as a ‘blueprint’ for cellular function. As the larva grows from the egg it produces, by means of the DNA coded into its cells, all the bodily parts needed for that stage of its life - its skin, mouth, muscles and all the



other organs needed for it to survive and grow. But hidden within the body of the larva are small discrete particles termed 'imaginal disks' - so called because they hold the 'image' of the future adult insect. They are packed full of a different DNA and remain dormant throughout virtually the entire life of the caterpillar or larva.

Then, when the caterpillar is ready to pupate, the DNA in these 'imaginal disks' springs into action. They form substances that alter the behaviour of the larva, making it sluggish, and eventually turn its skin into a hard, water-resistant coat.

Then, in the words of one biologist *'a biological miracle is going on inside that caterpillar'*. The once-dormant 'imaginal disks' produce enzymes that dissolve all the organs of the caterpillar, turning all its contents into a very nutritious soup. Then these disks set about rebuilding these chemicals into a new creature. One set of disks is programmed to produce the eye, others the body and the wings, etc (see diagram on page 27).

The result is that within a short time the caterpillar's substances have been completely reformed into a beautiful butterfly or other flying insect. This is just a very simple explanation - the actual process is far more involved and complicated. As another scientist says: *'Not even the most knowledgeable of insect physiologists are certain about every aspect of the process'*.

The evolutionary theory has as its basis the supposed fact that this phenomenon of 'metamorphosis' has come about by accidental changes over millions of years. But is it reasonable to believe that the intricate sequence of events outlined here could have happened by accident? Surely the only logical explanation is that there is a designer and controller who by His wisdom and skill has devised such a wondrous process.

Peter Southgate  
Surrey, UK



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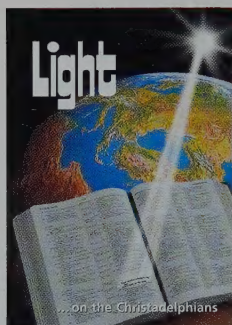
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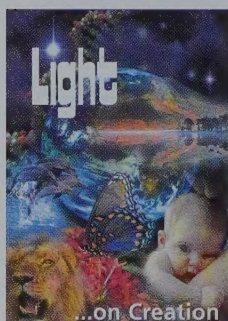


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